

By Email

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Dear colleagues,

**Ambition to halve healthcare associated Gram-negative blood stream infections by March 2021**

I am delighted to have been appointed as Director of Infection Prevention and Control for England and look forward to working with you all to halve healthcare associated Gram-negative bloodstream infection (BSI) rates across the NHS by 2021.

In response to Lord O'Neill's challenge to strengthen Infection Prevention and Control (IPC), the Secretary of State for Health has launched an important ambition to reduce Gram-negative BSIs by 50% by 2021. It is clear that we can only achieve this by working together across the NHS and by starting to take action now. Your commitment is crucial in making this ambition a reality.

The case for addressing infections within the NHS is clear. Evidence shows that these infections may have contributed to approximately 5,500 NHS patient deaths in 2015. This issue alone is set to cost the NHS £2.3 billion by 2018.

One of our first priorities must be addressing *Escherichia coli* BSIs, which represent 55% of all Gram-negative BSIs. Latest data from Public Health England show a large variation in infection rates across clinical commissioning groups (CCGs). *E. coli* BSIs have increased by a fifth in the last five years and the trend is worryingly continuing upwards. This is an important patient safety issue. Furthermore, preventing BSIs should have a major impact on reducing the need to prescribe antimicrobials, which is a key way of reducing the rise in antibiotic resistance.

I am hopeful that our combined efforts to reduce Gram-negative BSIs will mirror the impressive progress made in infection prevention and control in the last decade; since 2010, for example, the numbers of MRSA BSIs and *Clostridium difficile* infections have fallen by 57% and 45%, respectively.

In summary our plans to prevent infections within the NHS include:

- exemplifying and sharing best practice across the health system
- improving training on infection prevention for NHS staff
- showing the figures for *E. coli* cases on wards, making them visible to patients and visitors in the same way that MRSA and *C. difficile* cases are currently displayed
- improving incentives to promote the reduction in infection rates e.g. with a £45 million quality premium
- working with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to encourage a focus on infection prevention during inspections

We will be writing to you again shortly with further detail about this programme of work, including the comprehensive package of support NHS Improvement will be providing to help you meet this ambition. We are planning to offer:

- an improvement resource of good practice, co-produced with Public Health England (PHE) and colleagues across the NHS, which will continue evolve as we understand the most effective interventions
- regular Performance Improvement Network events throughout the year for the NHS to share examples of good practice, successes and challenges
- visits to healthcare economies to understand and share good practice across the country
- further analysis based on the data that PHE publishes to help organisations make rapid progress

This further letter will also request some actions that we would like you to take: the development of a plan that describes how you will contribute to achieving a reduction in *E.coli* for 2017/18. It will contain more detail on what this plan should contain, taking into account the role of CCGs, given a 10% reduction in *E.coli* BSIs is reflected in the 2017/18 Quality Premium.

Finally, we will also provide more detail regarding our plans to mandate the reporting of *Klebsiella* and *Pseudomonas* BSI figures during the year.

## Conclusion

We know this ambition is challenging; however, if we can achieve these reductions, the benefit to patients is immense. We also know that with excellent leadership and collaboration across all organisations within a healthcare economy we will be able to achieve it.

I look forward to working with you.



**Ruth May**  
**Executive Director of Nursing, NHS Improvement, Deputy CNO & National Director for Infection Prevention and Control**